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## Panama

## Biotechnology

## Agricultural Biotechnology Issues

2005

**Approved by:**

Katherine Nishiura  
FAS

**Prepared by:**

Hugo Salazar

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**Report Highlights:**

At present, there is no production of biotech products in Panama. Panama ratified the Cartagena Protocol, and in addition, approved an additional law to oversee biotech products. These laws have not been fully implemented. There is no indication of consumer concern about the presence of biotech products in the food supply. Specific marketing activities and capacity building seem to be good alternatives to advance acceptance of biotech products by consumers and government officials.

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Includes PSD Changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
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Panama [PN1]  
[PN]

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**Executive Summary**

At present, there is no production of biotech products in Panama. Panama ratified the Cartagena Protocol, and in addition, approved an additional law to oversee biotech products. These laws have not been fully implemented. There is no indication of consumer concern about the presence of biotech products in the food supply. Specific marketing activities and capacity building seem to be good alternatives to advance acceptance of biotech products by consumers and government officials.

**Production/Trade**

Panama does not produce biotech products, nor has it conducted any laboratory or field testing of agricultural biotechnology events. The United States supplied Panama with 35 percent of total imports of agricultural products, representing \$162 million in value, for CY04. By category, Consumer ready products are the most important, with products such as snack foods, processed fruits and vegetables, and turkey meat, the most popular. Bulk agricultural products are also important, among them: yellow corn and soybean meal for animal feeds, and wheat. Panama imports rice (99 percent from the United States) whenever local harvest does not meet demand, as is happening right now.

**Consumption**

Officially, no biotech products are consumed in Panama.

**Policy**

As a legal matter, two laws govern products of agricultural biotechnology in Panama: Law 72 of December 26, 2001, by which Panama adopted the Cartagena Protocol, and Law 48 of August 8, 2002. Neither law has been fully implemented.

Law 48 established a National Biosafety Commission for Genetically Modified Organisms. This commission is to be composed of:

- Minister of Agricultural Development
- Minister of Health
- Minister of Commerce and Industries
- Minister of Foreign Relations
- National Secretariat for Science and Technology
- Administrator of National Authority for the Environment
- Five representatives from: civil society, commercial sector, health, agriculture, environment, and the universities.

Once operational, the commission presidency is to be rotated among the above-mentioned Ministers. The commission will be charged with regulation and oversight of all aspects of production, introduction, consumption, etc. of all biotech products, and is to make a priority of the Cartagena Protocol and the precautionary principle. Implementation of Law 48 does not appear likely in the near term.

At the international level, Panama supports a policy of not requiring labeling for biotech products, a principle also applied at internal level for all food products.

**Marketing**

Despite occasional news reports and articles warning consumers about the supposed dangers of consuming biotech products, or products "contaminated" by them, local consumers do not seem to worry about it. Pro-biotech reports also appear, but less frequently.

**Capacity Building and Outreach**

In 2000, through the Cochran Fellowship Program, a University professor received training in biotechnology at Texas A & M University. In 2001 and 2002, State Department brought a guest speaker on this issue to make presentations in three different cities.

Many local technicians and government officials working in this field, including policy, teaching, and laboratory research (up to the tissue culture level) would greatly benefit from short term trainings in the U.S., but the language barrier has kept them out of actual possibilities. If courses biotechnology in Spanish could be provided, it would be of great benefit for improving local knowledge of this science, and also in the creation of regulations based upon science and risk analysis.